THE VISION OF AN ECO-FRIENDLY WORLD: A STUDY IN THE SELECT POEMS OF GARY SNYDER, TED HUGHES, MARY OLIVER AND LINDA HOGAN

A

SYNOPSIS

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This study makes a critical analysis of the ecological vision of the chosen ecopoets with reference to Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island* (1974), *This Present Moment* (2015); Ted Hughes' *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *Moortown Diary* (1980); Mary Oliver's *House of Light* (1990), *New and Selected Poems: Volume One* (1992); Linda Hogan's *The Book of Medicines* (1993) and *Dark Sweet* (2014). Besides contributing to the literary sphere of ecopoetry, this study also proposes to examine critically the contribution of these ecopoets towards creating environmental consciousness.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the attention of the world chiefly the western world was drawn towards the rampant exploitation of nature and degradation of environment resulting in climate change, global warming, ozone layer depletion, deforestation and extinction of species. The same environmental catastrophes could be witnessed in India during this time due to which various environmental movements began to take shape such as, THE SAVE SILENT VALLEY MOVEMENT, JUNGLE BACHAO ANDHOLAN, APPIKO MOVEMENT, NARMADA BACHAO AANDHOLAN etc. However, awareness concerning environment in India could be traced back to 1700s with the movements such as, BISHNOI MOVEMENT and the CHIPKO MOVEMENT in which the folks especially women hug the trees to protect them from being chopped off.

To address these environmental catastrophes, Dayalbagh Radhasoami Satsang Association of North America, U.S.A. has planned to launch the International Centre for Agroecology in New Jersey, U.S.A. in Feb/March 2022. The Centre has been established to proliferate researches from around the globe to address the global challenges such as, inequitable food availability, resource-intensive agricultural systems, massive deforestation, water scarcities, biodiversity loss, soil depletion, etc. The Dayalbagh community has already been practicing the concepts of agroecology to maintain a relationship between environment and the human beings.

The western nations organized various conferences to address these environmental issues in order to save the world from imminent natural disasters. In the literary sphere also, the litterateurs expressed their concern for environmental degradation through their writings emphasizing upon ecocentric approach wherein all living things and the environment at large is to be respected. This respect for nature and awareness of interconnectedness gave rise to the literary theory known as ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism is a literary and cultural theory which emerged in 1990s with the efforts of Cheryll Glotfelty, an American author and the Professor of literature and the environment at the University of Nevada. The first attempt towards establishing the field of ecocriticism was the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* by Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in 1996. Though the term 'ecocriticism' is said to be coined by William Ruckert in 1978, it gained prominence after Glotfelty suggested to the scholars present in the Western Literature Association to use the term 'ecocriticism' for the green writing, in 1989.

William Ruckert popularized the term 'ecocriticism' in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", published in 1996 in which he defined ecocriticism as a way "to find the grounds upon which the two communities- the human, the natural- can co-exist, cooperate and flourish in the biosphere" (*The Ecocriticism Reader* 107). Therefore, the field of ecocriticism chiefly aims at relocating focus of human beings from anthropocentric thinking towards ecocentric thinking and modifying the disbalanced ecological pattern in which man has kept himself on the highest pedestal thus satiating his ego. However, "nature is not the only focus of ecocritical studies of representation. Other topics include the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, Indians, technology, garbage and the body" (Glotfelty xxiii).

According to the Oxford Bibliographies, ecocriticism can be defined as, "a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture and the physical environment." The ever-widening gulf between the environment and the human beings, turned the attention of various writers to write with the objective of establishing the camaraderie between the two. The phrase, 'divorce between nature and humans' evolved due to this chasm between nature and human beings, resulting from the advancing scientific innovations, technological advancements, urbanization, industrialization and man's hegemonic attitude towards nature exhibiting the desire to subjugate nature for his own vested interests.

Ecocriticism as understood in the contemporary times evolved through three different phases in that the first phase was a romantic approach to nature where nature was celebrated and likewise represented in a romanticized manner. The second wave of ecocriticism concerned itself with the contemporary local issues related to environmental degradation, concern regarding flora and fauna, thus taking the first wave

forward. The third wave emerged as a universal approach which considered the global issues related to environment like ozone layer depletion, global warming, worldwide deforestation, increasing number of endangered species, etc.

It is not only the pattern of human behaviour responsible for the ecological crisis that is highlighted in ecocriticism but it also focuses on re-establishing a bond between human beings and nature paving way for a harmonious existence. Thus, there are various major aims of an eco-critic which a scholar of environment and literature studies must be acquainted with. First, it is the careful reading of a text to analyse the way nature has been represented in the text. The ecocritics analyse the works which involve the interrelationship between nature and human beings with the aim to promote the works with ecological concerns or ecological approach to motivate and persuade the readers to save and protect nature and natural resources which are not inexhaustible anymore. Second aim is to decenter the traditional approach of the writers towards nature and relate it to the contemporary environmental issues. Ecocriticism is an umbrella term with its offshoots as deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology ecopsychology and ecopoetry. Ecopoetry can be defined as, "a subset of nature poetry that while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues" (Bryson, *Ecopoetry*). Thus, ecopoetry does not romanticize nature, and like romantic nature poetry is not replete with pathetic fallacy instead twentieth century nature poetry is marked by supposed opposition to pathetic fallacy. According to Langbaum, the approach of twentieth century poets is "to feel in nature an unalterably alien, even an unfeeling, existence… than did the nineteenth century poets who felt in nature life different from but compatible with ours" (104). Basically, ecopoetry "persistently stresses human cooperation with nature conceived as a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems" (Scigaj 37).

Ecopoetry is not the "old-fashioned enthusiasms dressed up in new clothes" due to the emphasis on age-old theme of nature but is "to emphasize not just love of nature but proto-ecological knowledge and environmentalist commitment" (Buell, *The Future* 3). Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, Emerson's *Nature*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, Denham's *Cooper's Hill,* Thomson's *Seasons* along with Dickinson's garden poems are written with the backdrop of nature and natural settings, but unlike the verses of the Romantics and the Transcendentalists, ecopoems are based on a different perspective

and approach towards nature. Ecopoetry unlike the Romantic poetry is written with the aim of safeguarding the environment rather than being just a vehement and emotionally exuberant expression of the personal experiences of a poet with nature.

According to Bryson, "ecopoets render their conceptions of the world in such a way that their poems become models for how to approach the landscape surrounding us so that we view it as meaningful place rather than abstract space" (*The West Side* 23). Ecopoets though focusing on nature take up contemporary issues related to the environment which earlier nature poets did not make a mention of and the difference in the vision, objective and approach between the two can be easily discerned. The intended goal behind writing ecopoetry is to figure out the way in which environment should be treated and managed by human beings rather than just presenting the different aspects of nature. In other words, ecopoetry is marked by the "presence of the nonhuman as more than mere backdrop, the expansion of human interest beyond humanity, a sense of human accountability to the environment and of the environment as a process rather than a constant or given" (Buell, *The Environmental* 7-8).

According to Bryson, ecopoetry is characterized by three features, the first "recognition of the interdependence of the human and non-human world", the second "humility in relationships with both human and non-human nature" and the third "an indictment of an over technologized modern world and a warning… of ecological catastrophe." Unlike the Romantics and Transcendentalists, ecopoets are engaged consciously with "rhetorical act, whose purpose is social change."

Ecopoetry originated and gained momentum in America with a number of well- known ecopoets like Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, Merwin, Scigaj providing the impetus. However, poets from different nations have also made significant inroads into the domain of ecopoetry. Though these poets focus on environmental issues yet they differ in the aspects focused in their respective works in that some focus on culture, genocide, endangered species or territorial configurations. A few of the works emphasizing ecological aspect are *The Thunder Mutters* (2005) by Alice Oswald, *Redstart: an Ecological Poetics* (2012) by Forrest Gander and John Kinsella, *Earth Shattering; Ecopoems* (2007) edited by Neil Astley, Juliana Spahr's *This Connection of Everybody with Lungs* (2005) and *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015), *The Animals in That Country* (1969) by Margaret Atwood, Camille T. Dungy's *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (2009), Alexis Pauline Gumbs' *M. Archive: After*

The End of The World (2018), Toi Derricote's *Blackbottom* (2019), Cecil Giscombe's *Prairie Style* (2001), etc.

Gary Snyder, Ted Hughes, Mary Oliver and Linda Hogan are the established names in the sphere of ecopoetry who express their serious concern for the natural world and report their response or observations towards the environment not in the way of Romantics but as ecopoets. These poets have stressed upon biocentric approach, striving to demolish the dichotomy between the human beings and nature.

Gary Snyder (1930-), an American man of letters was born in California, U.S.A. who associated himself with the Beat poets since 1950s and explored various social and spiritual matters in prose and poetry. His concern for nature and preservation of natural world made him a spokesperson for the conservation of environment and he advanced his career as a poet, an essayist, a lecturer and an environmental activist. Zen Buddhism enticed him therein influencing his poetry and he prepared himself for studying in Japan, in 1955 he went to the First Zen Institute of America. He studied precepts of Zen Buddhism and returned to his country with his knowledge which he employed in his number of works, thereby his poetry has an essence of the principles of Zen Buddhism.

His works, either essays or poems are concerned with environment majorly and involve his experiences as a logger, fire-lookout, steam-freighter crew, and carpenter. A number of prizes were awarded to him such as Pulitzer Prize for *Turtle Island*, America Book Award for *Axe Handles*, Bollingen Prize for *Mountains and Rivers Without End* in 1956, Ruth Lily Poetry Prize in 2008 and Wallace Stevens Award in 2012. In his poetical works such as *Riprap* (1959) and *Myths and Texts* (1960), he included his experiences as a logger while his eastern religious ideas can be reflected in *The Black Country* (1967) and *Regarding Wave* (1969). His other poetical works are *Mountains and Rivers Without End, Danger on Peaks, This Present Moment*, etc.

In the introductory note to his work *Turtle Island* (1974), Snyder defined the title as , "the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millennia, and reapplied by some of them to 'North America' in recent years." Thus, this poetic collection of Snyder deals with nature and landscapes of primitive North America which catapulted into industrial suburbs of science and technology.

This Present Moment, published in 2015, is divided into four parts namely Outriders, Locals, Ancestors and Go Now focusing on the myths from different cultures, defining their sensibility towards nature. He gives a vivid and graphic representation of diverse birds, trees and the natural world, on one hand to describe their beauty and on the other hand, their destruction through machinery, trucks and generators. The different aspects taken up in this collection are wilderness, indigenous cultures, travel, domestic life, Buddhism etc.

The other selected poet, Ted Hughes (1930 - 1998), a well-known name among the twentieth century English poets was born at Yorkshire, England. He was a prolific writer writing on animals and environment and known for his activism towards water pollution, the concern being generated due to his interest in fishing. A number of poetry collections have been credited to Hughes such as *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) which earned him international reputation, *Lupercal* (1960), *Crow* (1971), *Wolfwatching* (1990), *Flowers and Insects* (1986), *Moortown Diary* (1979), *Cave Birds* (1979), *The Birthday Letters* (1998), *River* (2005) and *Selected Poems 1957-1994* (2002).

Moortown Diary (1979) is a collection of poems in which Hughes has recorded his experience of farming while working in the leisure time on the farm of his wife's father. Hughes observed the change in attitude towards farming in successive generations, the new generation being averse to farming and more interested in technological advancements. In the Preface to the collection, he writes, " …the older generation died off and gave way to the sons who were plunged into the financial nightmares, the technological revolutions and international market madness that have devasted farmers, farms and farming ever since…" (Preface Hughes).

The next selected collection of Hughes' poems *Remains of Elmet*, published originally in 1979 includes the poems which cover the region of Elmet. The collection is known for representing Hughes' environmental sensibility and environmental activism through his vision of the Calder valley which gets ecologically altered. This rewarding collection of Hughes focuses on the concept of nature as pitted against the human world by demonstrating interdependence between human beings and nature. Fay Godwin, a British photographer contributed to the collection by his photographs of the valley which capture its landscape.

The next selected poet, Mary Oliver (1935- 2019) is the popular name in the list of American ecopoets who write for nature and on nature. Oliver was born in 1935 in Ohio and was a prolific poet writing for establishing a communion between the natural world and man. More than fifteen collections of poetry are contributed by Oliver, *No Voyage and Other Poems* being her first collection of poems. The other popular collections are *Blue Horses* (2014), A *Thousand Mornings* (2012), *Swan* (2010), *Red Bird* (2008), *House of Light* (1990), *West Wind* (1997), *Winter Hours* (1997), etc. She is the winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

The chosen collection of Oliver's poems *House of Light* was published in 1990 for which she was awarded Christopher Award in 1991. As the title of the book *House of Light* suggests a house full of light that expels the darkness, similarly, the poems awaken the consciousness among readers regarding the world made by God which also constitutes nature. Goodreads reviews the collection as in which "… Oliver once again invites the reader to step across the threshold of ordinary life into a world of natural and spiritual luminosity". Oliver never lets the human world get separated from the environment and makes an illustrious attempt to inculcate environmental responsibilities in a human being. Her poetry unfolds as a meditative work upon environment which chronicles the profundities of nature.

New and Selected Poems: Volume One by Oliver is a collection of the new poems and the selected poems from eight poetic volumes of previous years. Published in 1992, this collection became the best-selling volume of poetry and Oliver was awarded National Book Award for it. In this collection, Oliver attempts to connect human life with the natural world and questions the concepts of life and death related to human beings. By bringing nature and life of human beings together, she acts as a great ecopoet for whom nature and human life are not separate but the two sides of the same coin.

Linda Hogan (1947-), a Chickasaw poet, novelist, essayist and environmentalist was born in Colorado, United States. Hogan's works including poetry, prose and fiction project different themes but the underlying theme is that of environment. Being an environmentalist and a volunteer for wildlife rehabilitation, Hogan advocates the conservation of environment and the need for establishing harmonious relationship between human beings and nature in her works. She is the author of various collections of poetry such as *Rounding the Human Corners* (2014), *The Book of Medicines* (1993), *Seeing Through the Sun* (1985), *Eclipse* (1983), *Indios* (2011), *Dark Sweet* (2014), etc. She has a

number of achievements to her credit such as the fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, The Henry Thoreau Award for nature writing, Lannan Literary Award for Poetry and Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas.

Hogan's *The Book of Medicines* was published in 1993 and can be well described as the collection in which "Hogan uses the act of speaking or making violent sounds in contrast with that of silence or singing and prayers to demonstrate in each poem how the land, the animals, and (sometimes) the humans in her poetry are feeling and interacting – a testimony to her culture's deep faith and sense of connection with nature" (Samson). The book became the National Book Critic's Circle Award finalist in 1994 and is popular for its rich images of the natural world of animals and the land in which she utilizes her experience as a volunteer and consultant of wildlife rehabilitation.

The next chosen collection is *Dark Sweet: New and Selected Poems* was published in 2014. It is a collection of various new poems and the selected poems from the previous collections since 1970s celebrating Hogan's environmental ethics. This collection provides a deeper insight into Hogan's environmental concerns, awareness, sensitivity as well as sensibility towards environment. Furthermore, it reflects the progression in Hogan's ideas as an environmentalist and a poet since 1970.

A few research papers and articles have been written by the scholars on ecopoetry of Gary Snyder, Ted Hughes, Mary Oliver, Linda Hogan. The critical works available on the poetic volumes of Snyder are "The Concept of Spatiality in Late Twentieth Century American Ecopoetry with Special Reference to Gary Snyder" by Arunabha Ghosh from the University of Burdwan, the focus being on the limited space available for wildlife with the progress of civilization; an article "Gary Snyder's Descent to Turtle Island: Searching for Fossil Love" by L. Edwin Folsom focusing the Snyder's appreciation of the practices Of Orientals towards nature and wilderness; "The Transatlantic Eco-Romanticism of Gary Snyder*"* by Paige Tovey tracing connections between Snyder and the other romantic predecessors namely, Wordsworth, Blake, Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau and *"*Both Sides Now: On Gary Snyder's *This Present Moment"* by Mark Gonnerman presenting a brief crisp review of this collection and praises Snyder's clear-sightedness and meditative voice in midst of struggle and destruction of the wilderness.

A few books have been written on the environmental poetry of Ted Hughes such as Jonathan Bate's *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, Leonard Scigaj's *Ted Hughes and Ecology: A Biocentric Vision*,

Yvonne Reddick's *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* and Keith Sagar's *Ted Hughes and Nature: Terror and Exultation*. Various articles have been written on Hughes' poetry such as, "The Contemporary Shaman, a Study of Ted Hughes' Poetry", "Animal Symbolism in Ted Hughes: A Study of Manichaeism in his Selected Poems", "Ecocritical Readings of Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney and Dylan Thomas" and "Nature in the Early Poetry of Ted Hughes: A Critical Study."

Though Mary Oliver is a well-known name among the twentieth century ecopoets yet very few research articles have been published on her poetry which necessitate an extensive exploration of Oliver's rich poetry. The past works attempted on Oliver's poetry are a chapter entitled, "Both Sides of the Beautiful Water: Mary Oliver" by J. Scott Bryson in his book *The West Side of Any Mountain* and an article "Poetry as Rhetorical Deliberation in the Work of Mary Oliver: The Necessity to Actively Observe." Thus, Oliver's poetry collections definitely need to be discussed more and given recognition for which this study can be a step forward.

It can be observed from the account of past literature published in regard to Hogan's ecocritical perspectives that most of the works are attempted on her fictional works and poetry has been somewhat left out. A few research articles which can be traced are "The Terrestrial and Aquatic Intelligence of Linda Hogan", "Genocide and Extinction in Linda Hogan's Ecopoetry" and a book by Peter Huang entitled *Linda Hogan and Contemporary Taiwanese Writers: An Ecocritical Study of Indigenous and Environment.* Considering the meagre number of publications on Hogan's ecopoetry, there arises a need for substantial research which would also allow the readers to get exposure to her poetic sensibility and aesthetics along with knowing about her environmental concerns.

Literature in the age of '-isms' such as feminism, postcolonialism, racism, existentialism, naturalism, expressionism revolves around social, cultural and political issues whereas environmentalism has been a dwindling subject in literature. In the present time, exploring various dimensions of the field of ecocriticism and ecopoetry stands out to be pivotal to establish a camaraderie between every living being and natural world created by the Supreme.

This study acknowledges ecopoetry as an active and upcoming field of study which is oriented towards breaking the hegemonic pattern in which human beings predominate over environment and is a ruminative endeavour towards unwinding the concern of Glen A. Love which is, "For the most part

English has been, and continues to be, conducted so as to serve as a textbook example of anthropocentrism: divorced from nature and in denial of the biological underpinnings of our humanity and our tenuous connection to the planet" (23). To the best of my knowledge, no comparative evaluation of these poets has been conducted by any researcher so far. The researcher hopes that this study will make a novel contribution to the domain of ecopoetry.

The Objectives for the proposed dissertation are:

1. To make a critical study of the burgeoning field of ecocriticism with special reference to ecopoetry.
2. To examine critically the ecological vision of the chosen poets and their contribution towards the environmental well-being with reference to their respective poetic volumes.
3. To make a comparative study of the selected poets with respect to their sensibility towards the environment.
4. To make a critical assessment of the style employed by the chosen poets, which will be incorporated in the respective chapters.

Keeping in view the above objectives, the chapter scheme is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Reconfiguring Territorial Associations: A Critical Study of the Selected Poems of Gary Snyder
- Chapter 3: Forging Environmental Sustainability: A Critical Appraisal of the Selected Poems of Ted Hughes
- Chapter 4: Fostering a World of Harmony: A Critical Assessment of the Selected Poems of Mary Oliver
- Chapter 5: Nurturing Biocentric Perspective: A Critical Analysis of the Selected Poems of Linda Hogan
- Chapter 6: Conclusion: Envisioning Ecocentric World

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